My Dear Mary.

All thou bar-born terms which the gallant headed Hal lavished so laughingly on merry old Falstaff, are due to me for my delay — and though their appliance to me would be feeble as far as personal appearance goes, yet would they be strictly attachable on the score of sloth, and neglect. — But I am accusing myself unjustly, — and merely, I believe, for the sake of revenging myself upon an allusion to my favourite Poet. I like to begin with some word to or recollection of Shakespeare, — right down! To pluck a lovely feather from the young wing of his Imagination and deck the ~~fools~~ cap of my letter with its His name, surrounded as it is with the unquenchable light of perfect fame, shines on the vacant waste of my Paper, like a cloudless sun at mid-day glowing on Salisbury Plain. His pen is the key with which we unlock the gates of all Ancient Cities and wander among Tribes, and become familiarized with all the olden manners. By his aid, as Aladdin was by the Magicians, we are led through the magnificent chambers of the Earth, and see Evergreen Plants & Trees, and Ever fresh fruits and pluck jewells from all things around us. Here is truly a Congress of all the noblest beings of the most majestic Nations assembled in his works, speaking a language

me to the veriest Moonlight of Nature, and catching at, & scattering ~~on~~ on Earth, ~~[illegible]~~ fancies, merely Poetical — But I am becoming Poetical, (the everlasting fault of my Letters) and what is more, tedious and prosaical. You will say of me, as Iago says of himself that "I am nothing, if not critical." — However I will here release You from this needless Eulogy on Shakespeare, which you could so well Enter into without its being Expressed, and become now Literal. — I have been long resolving to write to You, and as long hesitating any resolution: Various causes, - important & imperative as far as concern myself, but which could not interest You, - have prevented me from paying that attention to You, which even good-manners demanded, had there not been a higher voice, - that of friendship - calling upon me. That I have blamefully delayed - I honestly admit, - and sincerely ask your pardon.

Last night I passed the Evening with our friend Rice, and in a way which of all others is the one nearest to my heart, - the conversation on tasteful & happy & domestic subjects. George Dyer and Bailey (who is suddenly called up to London by the death of a Friend) made up our party. We were all as comfortable

as Man ought to be; — that is, — delightfully quiet and conversational. — On Thursday last Hazlitt was with me at home, and remained with us till 3 o'Clock in the morning, — full of Eloquence, — Warm, soft, & communicative of every thing, Imaginative & Intelligent, — breathing out with us the peculiar & favourite beauties of our Lord Byron, — passing from grand & commanding argument to the gaieties & graces of wit & humour, — and the Elegant and higher beauties of Poetry. He is indeed great company, and leaves a weight on the mind, which "it can hardly bear." He is full of what Dr. Johnson terms "good talk." His countenance is also strongly fine: — a sunken & melancholy face, — a forehead lined with thought and bearing all full & strong pulsation; — an exciting subjects, — an eye, dashed in its light with sorrow, but kindling & flashing at intellectual moments, — and a stream of coal-black hair dropping around all. Such a face, so silent and so sensitive, is indeed the banner of the mind. "It is as a book, in which Men may read strange things." He would have become the pencil of Titian, and have done justice to the soul-fed colours of that bold & matchless Italian: I fear you will be tired with this long Personality, but I remember having read a few pages of his to you, and therefore imagine that you will not be wholly uninterested in him. — What a fine Room was that in your Room with Eliza, Maria & yourself! — Do you remember it? — I have not